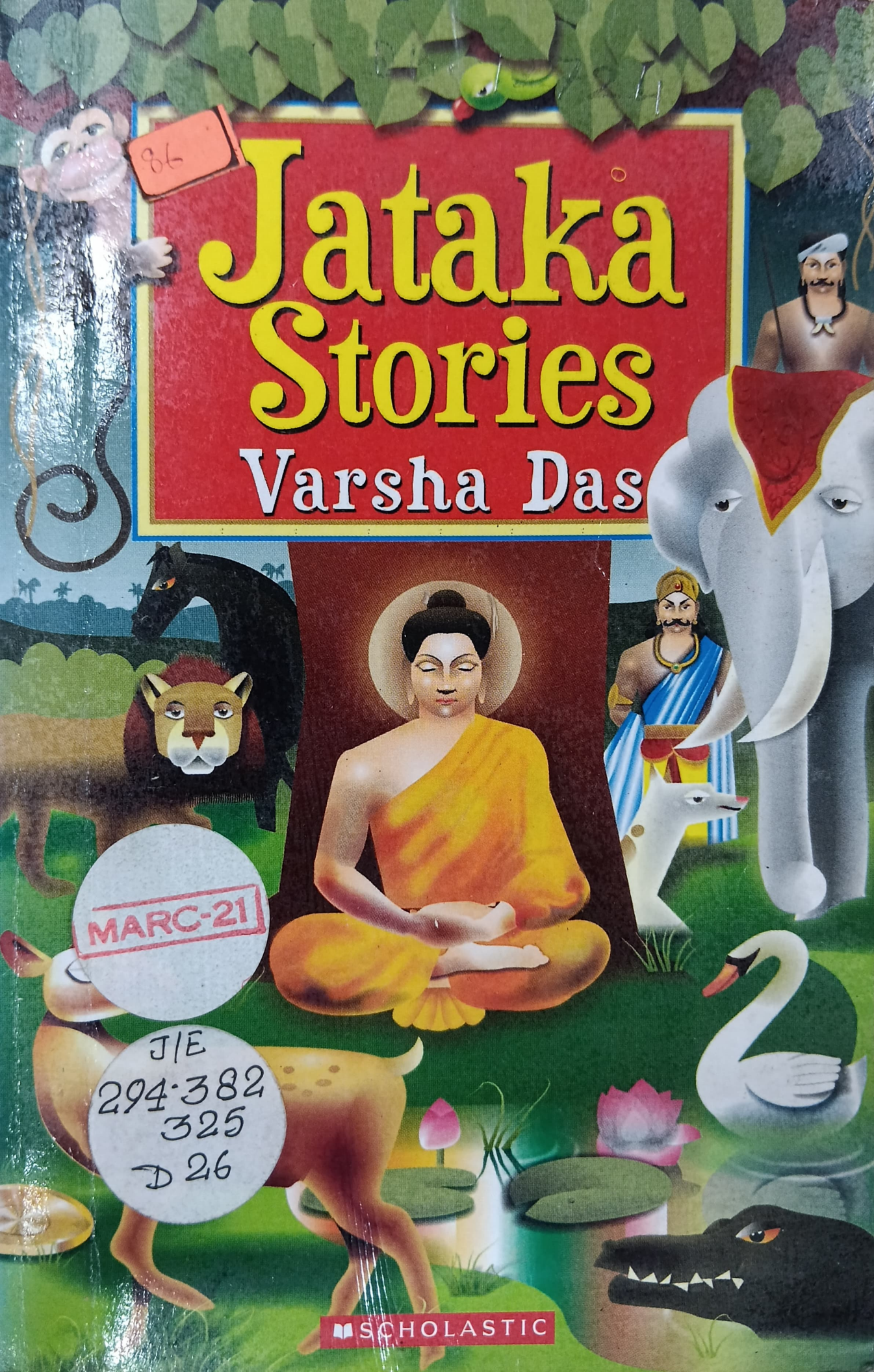

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Jataka Stories

Jataka Stories

Varsha Das

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Wise Businessman

It was a beautiful evening. Gautam Buddha was sitting with some of his disciples in the monastery. The Buddha often used to speak about his past lives when he was born as a bird or an animal or a human being. Whatever might be his form, he was always kind and considerate. Each of his narrations was like a story, and the Buddha in each story was a Bodhisattva, the one who leads others to the right path.

One of the disciples present that evening was a rich businessman called Anathapindaka. An ardent devotee of the Buddha, he wanted to listen to the story of that life when the Buddha was born as a good businessman, and his cousin Devadatta, a foolish one. Some other people overheard their conversation and joined the group. The Buddha began to narrate the story:

Long ago, in the city of Varanasi lived a businessman who travelled a lot to sell his goods. He had 500 bullock carts. He would load them with beautiful things and take the carts to distant places. He loved to explore new cities for business.

He was blessed with an intelligent son. That was Bodhisattva. His father gave him a good education and training in business management. When the son grew up, his father handed over the business to him.

Bodhisattva was very happy to be of some help to his father. One day he decided to go to a new

destination. He loaded the 500 carts with his specially manufactured goods, took the cart drivers and attendants along and set out for the journey. But before he could cross the boundary of Varanasi he saw another young businessman with as many bullock carts. He, too, was perhaps going in the same direction to sell his goods.

Bodhisattva went up to the young man and said, "I think, both of us are going in the same direction. 1000 bullock carts cannot be accommodated on this road. It would be better if one of us goes first and the other starts the journey after about 2 weeks. Would you like to go first or would you like me to go first?"

The other man was not so wise. He thought if I go first, I will get fresh grass for my bulls and clean water for all of us. I will also capture the market and sell my goods at high price. So he told the Bodhisattva, "I would like to go first. You can go later."

The good businessman was happy to hear the decision for more than one reason. The new road was rough. The first caravan would smoothen the uneven path. His animals would eat grown up, stale grass whereas the bulls of the next caravan would get fresh tender grass. In the absence of water on that route those who went first would dig wells, which could be utilized by the second caravan. And lastly, it was always difficult to fix rates of the goods in a new market. The one going first would fix the rates at a good profit. The one who follows would happily sell his goods at the same price!

The good businessman thus found many benefits in letting the other businessman go first! The first

caravan took with it many pots of water. They knew about the scarcity of water on that route. But they had no idea about the demons living in the forest. Those demons would appear in different forms and trick the travellers to death. And then eat them up!

One demon noticed the caravan of the 500 bullock carts. He also saw the pots full of water. He immediately thought of a plan to kill them all. He dressed up like a king and wet his clothes and hair. He put a garland of fresh lotus flowers around his neck and armed with his weapons rode a chariot. He took with him some of his junior demons. They looked like the king's guards. The demon king stopped his chariot as he came close to the businessman's cart. Pointing to his wet clothes he said, "There is lot of water ahead. Besides, it is raining heavily out there. Look at me. I got completely drenched. Why are you carrying so much burden on your carts? Throw away those water pots. Let your bulls feel lighter and walk faster."

The foolish businessman believed him and got all the pots thrown out of the carts. The earthen pots broke into hundreds of pieces. The thirsty hot ground quickly soaked the water. The caravan moved on. They continued in the heat and sweat. There was no rain, no water, and no cool breeze. In the scorching sun the hot wind was getting hotter and unbearable. The businessman, his staff and all his animals were thirsty and completely exhausted. First one person fell, then another, then a bull and so on. Within a few days all of them including the businessman, died of heat and thirst. The demons immediately rushed to eat them up! In no time there were only bones left.

Having filled their bellies the demons disappeared!

A fortnight later the good businessman set out on the same road. Before entering the forest he got many pots filled up with water. And then he instructed his staff not to throw away even a cup of water. He also warned them about poisonous plants in the forest, "No one should eat even a single leaf, fruit or flower without checking with me."

His strict orders were only to protect his people and animals. He wanted them to live, and live happily.

Well, the caravan entered the forest. The demon tried to play the same trick again. He appeared in wet clothes with a lotus garland around his neck! The good businessman's eyes and mind were sharp. He immediately noticed that the so-called king never batted his red eyes and so was not human. His clothes and hair were wet but there were no clouds in the sky!

The demon advised the businessman to throw away all the water pots so that the carts would become lighter and move faster.

The wise man replied : "A good businessman never throws away water without reaching the water reservoir." And the caravan moved ahead.

On the way they saw the miserable end of the first caravan. They all felt sad for the people and animals that had met such a tragic death, only because their leader had been so foolish.

The wise leader managed to reach his destination without any accident. He sold all his goods at a high price and returned to Varanasi richer and happier.

How important it is to be wise and observant, positive and patient!

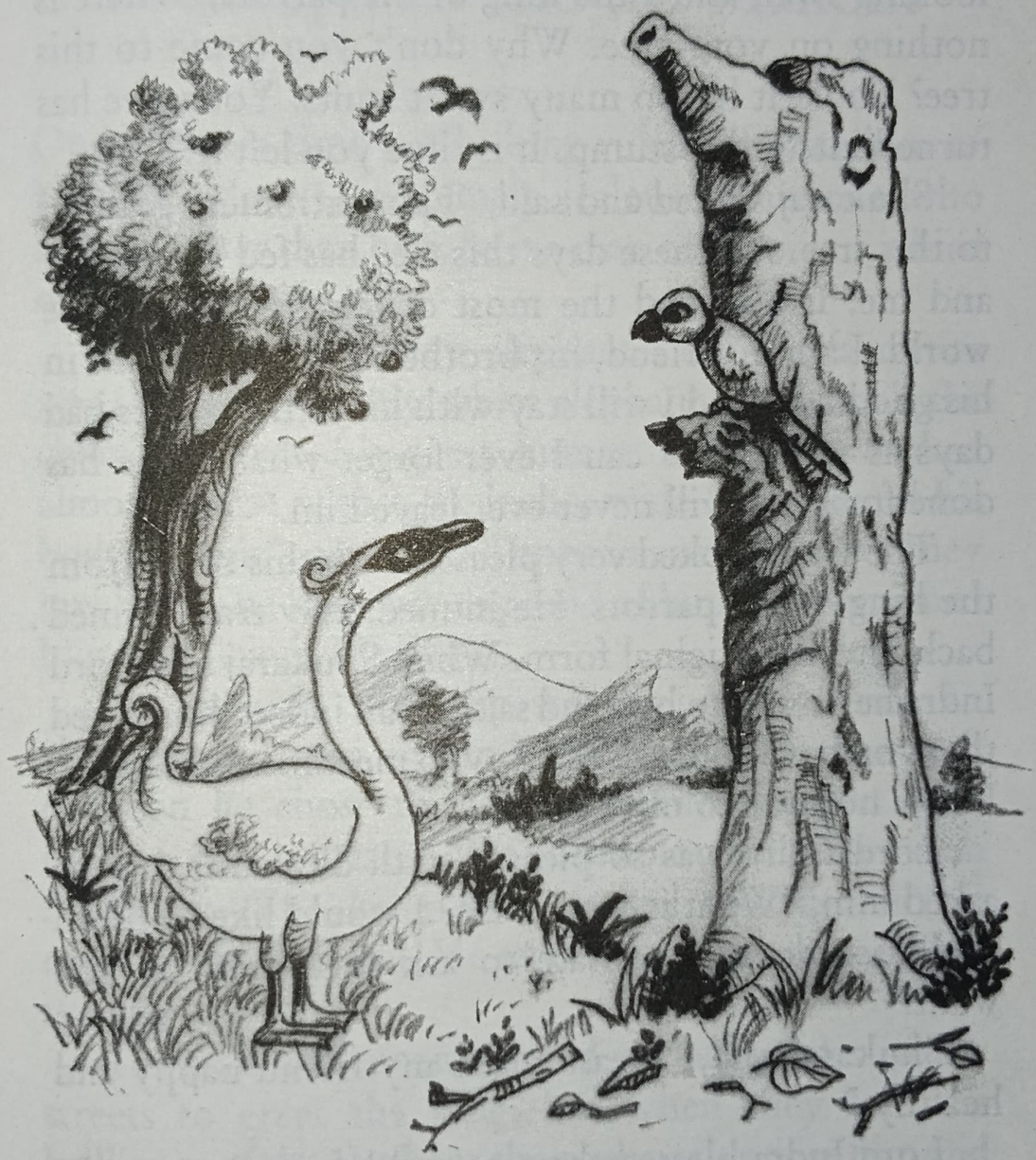
The True Friend

A beautiful orchard stood in a valley of the Himalayas. The river Ganga had made the land so fertile that the trees in that orchard were always full of fruits. These fruits attracted thousands of parrots.

On one such tree lived the king of parrots, Shukaraj. He loved the tree and the tree too was very fond of him. One day the tree fell sick. Its fruits fell off and despite that Shukaraj did not abandon the tree. He ate its leaves and drank water from the river Ganga. The next day even the leaves fell off. Yet Shukaraj stayed on. He ate tiny twigs and drank water from the river. Shukaraj was happy and contented.

Lord Indra in heaven was looking at the affairs of the world from up above. He came to know that there was a parrot Shukaraj, happy and contented even when he had almost nothing to eat! He could not believe that earthly creatures, normally highly self-centred, could possess such noble qualities. Lord Indra wanted to test Shukaraj. He used his supernatural powers and made the tree completely dry. Now there were no fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no twigs, nothing, except the dry porous trunk. In spite of all this Shukaraj did not leave the tree. He noticed some powdery stuff falling from the pores. He ate that and drank the river water. He still looked quite happy and contented.

Lord Indra was most impressed by Shukaraj. He



decided to load that tree with the fruits of immortality after talking to Shukaraj. He became a swan and flew to the tree standing next to the Shukaraj's. This ordinary looking swan asked the king of the parrots, "There is nothing on your tree. Why don't you come to this tree? Look, it has so many sweet fruits. Your tree has turned into a dry stump. It is time you left it."

Shukaraj smiled and said, "I am extremely grateful to this tree. All these days this tree has fed my family and me. It also had the most delicious fruits in the world. I am his friend, his brother. I was with him in his good days and I will stay with him through his bad days as well. How can I ever forget what all he has done for me! I will never ever leave him."

The swan looked very pleased with this reply from the king of the parrots. He immediately transformed back into his original form. When Shukaraj saw Lord Indra he bowed to him and said, "I am indeed honoured that you have come all the way to meet me. I am sorry, I have no food to offer you."

Lord Indra was so pleased with Shukaraj that he asked him, "What is your wish? I would like to fulfill it. Please do not hesitate to ask for whatever you want."

Shukaraj said, "Please make my friend happy and healthy."

Lord Indra blessed the tree and left for heaven. In moments the tree became full of leaves and fruits. Seeing his friend regain its lustrous and green form Shukaraj felt the happiest of all.

The Elephant and the Mahout

Once upon a time a silly king ruled the kingdom of Magadh. He was extremely jealous of anyone who looked better than him, be it a man or a woman, a bird or even a beast!

The king had many elephants, but his favourite was the one and only white elephant. He had all the characteristics of a great human being! He looked almost divine with a six inches wide halo around his body. People's mouths fell open in awe whenever they saw him. The king was so proud of him that he named him Auspicious Elephant.

On festivals, the king was supposed to ride an elephant and take a round of the city. On one such occasion he chose to ride the white elephant. The mahout had decorated him with colourful patterns on his body. The king was pleased to ride such a magnificent elephant. He set out for his usual round of the city.

Thousands of people stood on both sides of the streets to greet the king, but when they saw the brilliance of the elephant they began to praise him and ignored the king. He saw the same response of the people everywhere. Some awed by the elephant's halo had thrown flowers and garlands on him. Others struck by his beauty praised him aloud.

The king turned green with jealousy. He could not

bear his people paying so much attention to his elephant. He was bursting with envy and anger. The poor elephant was no rival to the king, but an angry and jealous person can hardly think straight! In that state of mind he decided to kill the elephant. However he could not order his killing because the animal had already become so popular. The king thought of a wicked plan. He asked the mahout to cut short the city tour and return to the palace immediately.

On his way back the king planned such a strategy that the elephant's death would look like an accident. He decided to take the elephant to the top of the mountain Vepulla and then manipulate an accident in the forceful waterfall.

When they reached the palace the king alighted from the elephant and asked the mahout, "So, you have been looking after this elephant. Haven't you?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," said the mahout awaiting further instructions.

"Have you taught him any tricks?" was the next question.

"Oh, I have taught him many tricks," the mahout proudly replied.

"Well, can this elephant climb the mountain Vepulla and reach the peak?"

"Yes, of course," replied the mahout.

"Then take him there. I want to see how, with this heavy body he manages to climb the steep mountain."

The mahout sat on the elephant and they headed towards the mountain. The king followed him with his retinue. In no time, Auspicious Elephant was on the top of the mountain. The king was on his fastest

horse but he could not compete with him! The mahout very happily told the king, "Here we are!"

"Very well done!" said the king and quickly added, "Don't come down. Have you taught him to stand on three legs?"

The moment the mahout said, "Yes, I have," the elephant lifted one leg and calmly stood on the three.

"Bravo!" said the king. "Now make him stand on his two hind legs. Do you think he can do that?"

The elephant immediately lifted his front legs and was standing quite comfortably on the two hind legs. The mahout proudly patted him and asked the king, "Can we come down now?"

"Not as yet. I want to watch a few more tricks. Make him turn towards the waterfall and ask him to stand on the front legs," ordered the king.

The elephant now faced the waterfall and lifted his hind legs!

Everyone except the king clapped for him and showered praises on the mahout and the elephant. The king was enraged. His next move was rather dangerous.

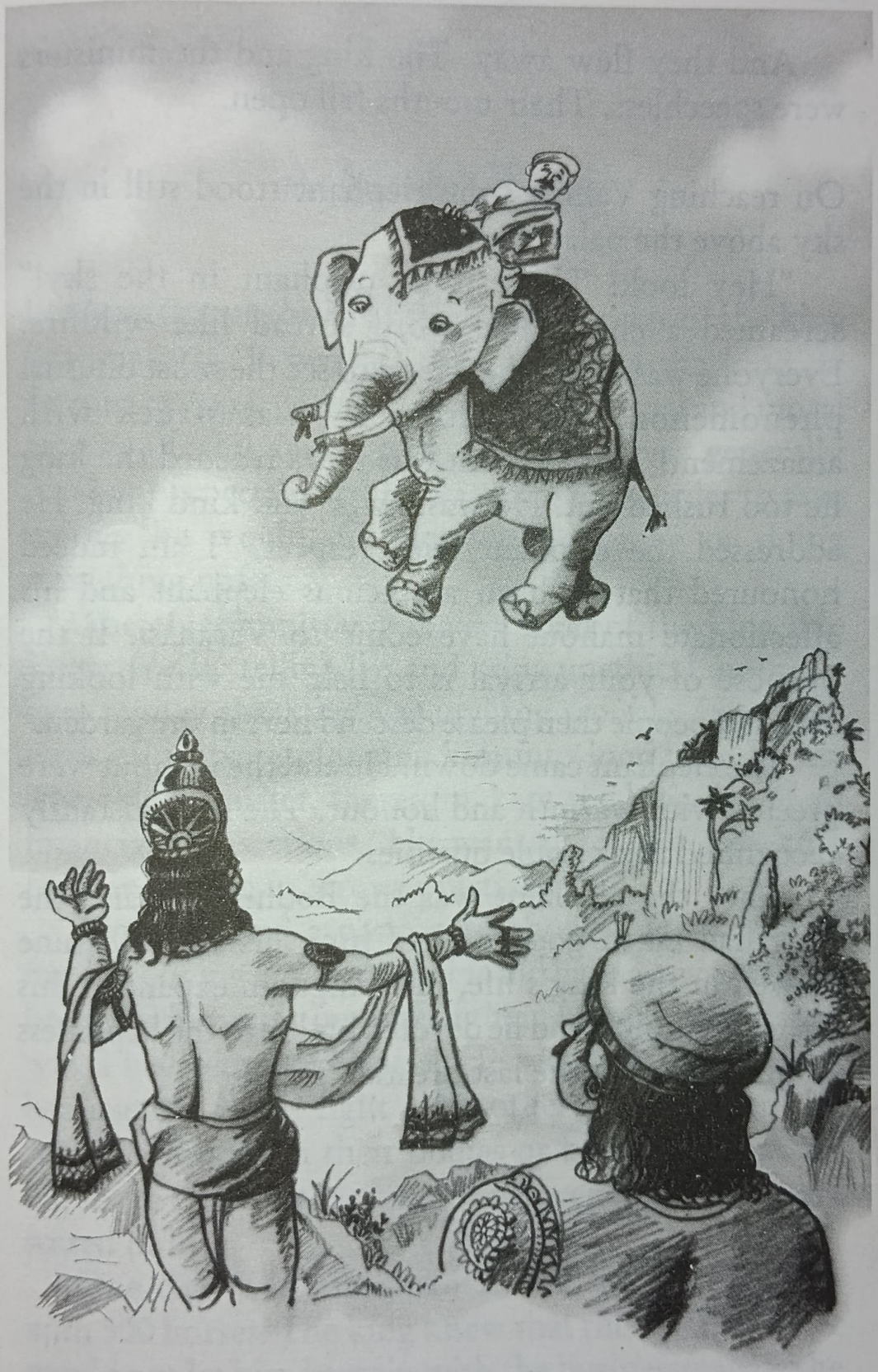
"How about standing on one leg?" The king was sure that the elephant would lose his balance and would slip into the waterfall. But this was no ordinary elephant. Like a dainty dancing girl the elephant lifted his three legs and stood only on one with perfect balance of the body.

There were cheers all around but the king was exasperated. He had tried everything but he could not achieve his goal. As the last shot the king ordered an impossible feat. He asked the mahout, "Have you taught him how to stand in the sky?"

Now the mahout became suspicious about the king's intentions. Auspicious Elephant had the powers to fly and he could even stand in the sky. He was about to lift his body above the ground when the mahout whispered in his ears, "This king is asking you to perform all these tricks because he wants to kill you. He has malice and jealousy in his heart. Your life is precious. You are a very special auspicious elephant. Let us fly away to Varanasi. The king of Varanasi is a learned and noble man. Both of us will live happily over there, and serve the king."

"I think you are right. Let me put you on my back." The elephant picked up the mahout with his trunk and safely placed him on his back. Then he concentrated on his positive powers. He told the mahout, "Hold me tight. I am going to take off now."

The elephant with the mahout flew up and stood in the sky facing the king of Magadh. The king realised his mistake. He apologised to the elephant and asked him to come back but it was too late. The mahout's parting words reached the king's ears, "You are not worthy enough to possess such an auspicious elephant. He has extraordinary positive powers. He uses them to give happiness to others. And you have negative tendencies like jealousy, arrogance, and conceit. You always want to harm those who are better than you. What a pity, you could not appreciate such a wonderful elephant who was so loyal to you. You even wanted to kill him! Please remember what I am going to tell you now. When a foolish person receives a huge inheritance he destroys it. The same has happened to you."



And they flew away. The king and the ministers were speechless. Their mouths fell open.

On reaching Varanasi the elephant stood still in the sky above the palace garden.

"Hey look! There is an elephant in the sky!" screamed a child. The word spread like wildfire. Everyone was out in the streets to see the most unusual phenomenon. The whole city was struck with amazement! The moment this news reached the king he too rushed out. He was a wise and kind king. He addressed the elephant with respect, "I am indeed honoured that such an auspicious elephant and his affectionate mahout have come to Varanasi. If the purpose of your arrival is to help me with looking after my people then please descend here in my garden."

The elephant came down. He and the mahout were greeted with warmth and honour. The king instantly recognised their noble qualities.

Since the elephant was the Bodhisattva and the king had taken good care of him, his good fortune flowed in the king's life. His kingdom expanded, his riches multiplied and he devoted his life to the happiness of his people till the last breath.

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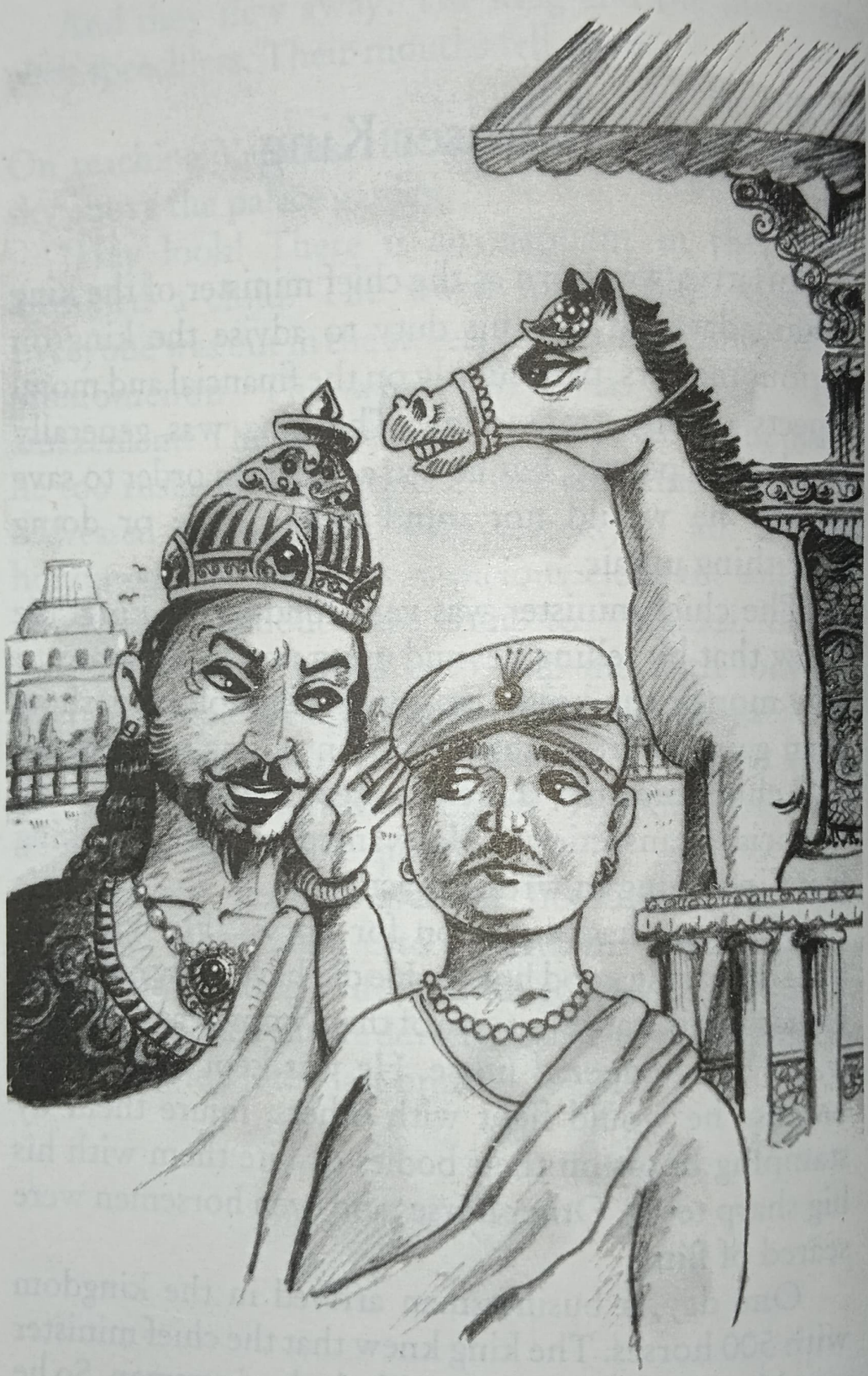
A Miser King

Bodhisattva was born as the chief minister of the king Brahmadatta. It was his duty to advise the king on various matters, particularly on the financial and moral aspects of any transaction. The king was generally good to his people, but he was a miser. In order to save money he would not mind telling a lie or doing something unfair.

The chief minister was very fond of the king. He knew that by telling lies and using unethical means to save money the king was inviting trouble. His short term gains were plunging him into long term losses. The chief minister, therefore, kept the king out of all financial transactions. He wanted to save the king from indulging in wrong practices.

The king had a passion for horses. He was very fond of buying good horses. He did have a few excellent breeds in his stable but one of them known as Mahason was a bad tempered horse. He was kept in isolation because he would fight with others, injure them by stamping hoofs on their bodies or bite them with his big sharp teeth. Other horses and even horsemen were scared of him.

One day, a businessman arrived in the kingdom with 500 horses. The king knew that the chief minister would not let him bargain with the businessman. So he decided to call another minister to strike the deal. As if



this was not enough the king whispered in the minister's ears, "Don't talk to the businessman right away. You let Mahason loose among the 500 horses at night. He will injure all the horses. They will be in pain because of their wounds. They will not be able to eat or sleep. Without food and rest they will become weak and run poorly. You can then discuss the price of those horses with the businessman. Because of their poor performance he will have to quote a low price. Have you understood my plan?"

The minister was shocked to see how low the king stooped to save money. The one who should set an example through his own behaviour was cheating! The minister had no courage to correct the king. He got Mahason from the stable at midnight. The haughty horse went about injuring each horse throughout the night. He was sent back to the stable before the break of dawn. When the businessman saw the condition of his injured horses he could not believe his eyes. He had fed them in the evening. They were healthy and happy. But their condition in the morning was miserable. At that point the minister arrived to evaluate the horses. Their performance was obviously very poor so the minister quoted a very low price.

The businessman would incur heavy losses if he accepted the price quoted. He told the minister, "I am aware of the king's passion for horses. I have come from a far-off land. I expect a better price."

"But you have seen for yourself how they ran! We cannot pay more." The minister made his stand clear.

"Please give me one more day. Let me think about it," said the businessman.

On an earlier occasion the same businessman had negotiated with the chief minister and had received a handsome amount. He thought of consulting him. When he narrated the whole incident, the chief minister felt very sorry for the king. He gave a sound advice to the businessman, "Please don't sell your horses this time. Take them back with you. Tend their wounds and feed them well. Do come back as soon as they become fit."

The businessman agreed but he had a little doubt, "But the king might play the same trick. Mahason would attack my horses once again. Then I would be in a greater trouble because travel costs a lot to me."

"I do sympathise with you," replied the chief minister. In the same breath he asked, "Do you have a bad tempered horse like Mahason?"

"Yes, I do have one. His name is Suhanu. He is as wild and wicked as Mahason."

"Bring him along when you come next," advised the chief minister.

A few months later all the horses were fit once again. Their wounds were fully healed. They looked more rubust and handsome than earlier. The businessman returned to the kingdom of King Brahmadatta with his 500 horses and Suhanu. He informed the king about his arrival.

The king, this time, did call his chief minister but he also sent for the other minister to repeat the trick.

The king's wicked horse was let loose at night. He was expected to bite and attack the horses brought by the businessman. Instead, something strange happened. Mahason did not even look at the other horses. He

went straight to Suhanu. Nobody had ever seen Mahason so gentle and affectionate! He and Suhanu looked very happy to have met each other!

The king was utterly puzzled. He asked the minister to explain the reason behind Mahason's changed behaviour. The minister himself was so dumbfounded, he had no answer. The king then called the chief minister to solve this mystery.

As soon as the chief minister arrived the king asked him to explain the most unusual phenomenon they had witnessed.

"Well, the reason is quite simple. Conflict normally arises between two persons or creatures of opposite temperament and character. In the present case, Mahason and Suhanu, both are equally wild and wicked. So there is no conflict between them! They are happy to be together." The chief minister explained and gave a meaningful smile to the businessman.

The chief minister continued, "The king should be kind and generous. A miserly king harms his people and also his own reputation. An unfair king does not command respect from anyone."

The king felt ashamed of himself. He repented and confessed, "I am sorry. I do realise my mistake." He asked the chief minister to evaluate the horses and pay the businessman the right price.

The wise chief minister smiled and obeyed. Ultimately, justice did prevail.

Greedy Sparrow

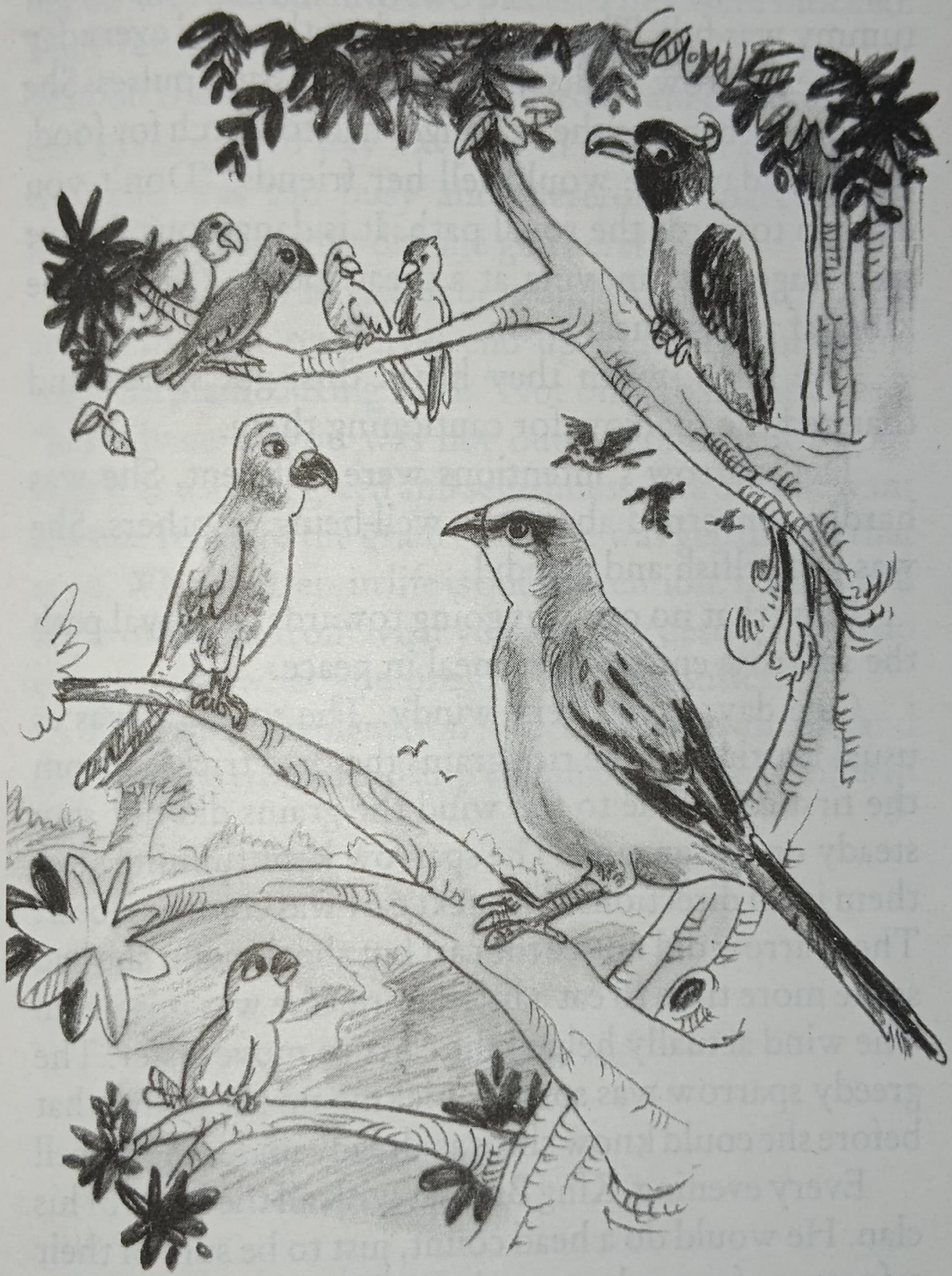
Bodhisattva was once born as a bird. He lived in a forest with many other birds. The forest was full of fruit trees. This was perhaps the only place where birds and animals lived like friends. They even shared food and enjoyed life in complete harmony.

Bodhisattva bird was wise and kind. Because of these qualities all the birds and animals addressed him as King Bird.

One year was particularly hot and dry. King Bird could not bear the birds suffering from the scorching heat. He felt, it was his duty to find a better place for them. He, alone flew in different directions looking for a good place to spend the hot summer. Suddenly, he noticed snow-peaked mountains. His heart was full of joy. He returned to the forest and addressed a meeting of all the birds and animals, "My dear friends, I am indeed sorry to see how you all are suffering in this heat. I would like to suggest that till the weather improves let us migrate to the valley near those snow-peaked mountains. You will be happy to live there."

King Bird's advice was for the good of all. They all flew to the valley. This place was definitely more comfortable and beautiful. The birds were happy.

Amongst these birds was a stupid greedy sparrow. One day, she noticed a row of carts moving on the road leading to the palace. These were full of big baskets



carrying grains for the royal kitchen. The sparrow dashed along to eat those grains and kept eating till her tummy was full. The carts passed on the road everyday and the sparrow fed itself on rice grains and pulses. She was happy because she no longer had to search for food.

Everyday, she would tell her friends, "Don't you dare go towards the royal path. It is dangerous. I have seen huge carts moving at a great speed. You will be killed if you go near them."

The birds, when they heard this, got scared and thanked the sparrow for cautioning them.

The sparrow's intentions were different. She was hardly concerned about the well-being of others. She was just selfish and greedy!

Now that no one was going towards the royal path the sparrow enjoyed her meal in peace.

One day, it was very windy. The sparrow was as usual feasting on the rice grains that had trickled from the first cart. Due to the wind the grains did not stay steady on the ground. The sparrow kept running after them in all directions. The next cart was coming closer. The sparrow did notice the cart but she thought she had some more time to eat a little more. She was mistaken! The wind actually helped the carts to move faster. The greedy sparrow was so busy picking up the grains that before she could know she was already under the wheel!

Every evening, King Bird sat with all the birds of his clan. He would do a head count, just to be sure of their safe return from wherever they might have gone during the day. That evening he found the greedy sparrow missing. He sent some birds to search for her. They went in different directions.

The birds that had gone towards the royal path saw her on the road cut into two pieces. They were shocked. They returned to King Bird and reported, "We saw her dead on the royal path. It is indeed strange because she had advised us to stay away from that road saying that the road was too busy and therefore dangerous for birds. But then why did she go there?"

"Those who advise others and do not put it into action in their own lives end up in such a miserable way," explained King Bird. "Not only that," he added, "her advice to you was not out of concern for your safety. It was her greed and selfishness. She did not want anyone to share the grains that she was getting on that road. What matters in life is one's intention. If what you say is different from what you actually desire, if you do not practise what you preach, you will suffer."

King Bird's explanation helped the birds understand the value of true friendship and sharing with friends in life.

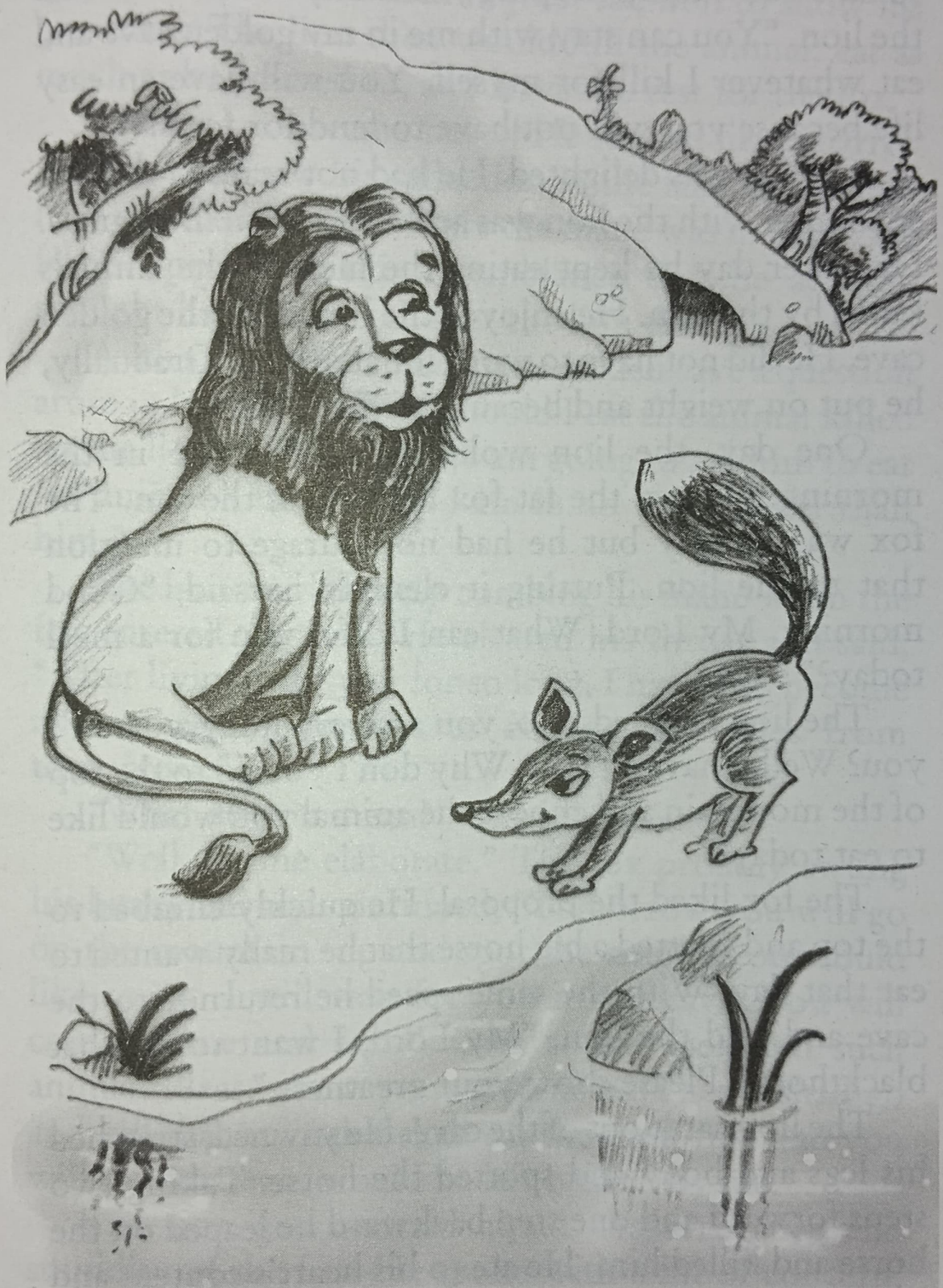
The Foolish Fat Fox

There was a beautiful golden cave in the Himalayas. It was big and bright. In that cave lived the king of the jungle, a robust golden skinned lion. All animals had great regard for him. He lived a comfortable life. That had also made him a bit lazy. He loved his easy-going life.

One day the lion overslept. He woke up a little after noon. He realised that he was hungry. He never ate stale food. He would have to go out and find some food. He came out of his cave. The day was bright and beautiful. He yawned, stretched his legs and body to shake off laziness and looked around for a prey. He spotted a big bison near the lake. Taking slow and steady steps he moved in his direction.

The bison saw the king of the jungle approaching him. He did not run for his life. The lion killed him and had his fill. He drank cool water from the lake and started walking towards the cave for a siesta. A foolish fox by mistake crossed his path. He thought that the king would be furious at his stupid act and might kill him right away. So, even before the lion could notice him the fox fell at his feet and said, "My Lord, I have come from the forest very far from here, only because I want to serve you. You are the great king of the jungle."

"Well, since you have taken the trouble of coming



so far I don't mind keeping you as my attendant," said the lion. "You can stay with me in my golden cave and eat whatever I kill for myself. You will have an easy life because you will not have to fend for food."

The fox was delighted. He had not realised that his encounter with the lion was actually a boon in disguise. Day after day he kept eating the meat of the animals killed by the lion. He enjoyed the luxury of the golden cave. He did not have to work for anything. Gradually, he put on weight and became Mr Fat Fox!

One day, the lion woke up a little late in the morning. He saw the fat fox basking in the sun. The fox was hungry but he had no courage to mention that to the lion. Putting it cleverly he said, "Good morning, My Lord. What can I offer you for a meal today?"

The lion laughed, "So, you are very hungry, aren't you? Well, I have an idea. Why don't you go to the top of the mountain and choose the animal you would like to eat today?"

The fox liked the proposal. He quickly climbed to the top and spotted a big horse that he really wanted to eat that day. With the same speed he returned to the cave and told the lion, "My Lord, I want to eat that black horse. Please show your greatness."

The lion came out of the cave. He yawned, stretched his legs and body and spotted the horse. Taking two steps forward and one step backward he leaped on the horse and killed him. He ate to his heart's content and left the rest for the fox. The fat fox also ate till his belly was full and bloated!

This became their daily routine. The fox would

spot the animal and then request the lion to show his greatness. The lion then would kill the animal, eat as much as he wanted to, and leave the rest for the fox.

The fat fox became fatter! He looked like a barrel. But when he saw his reflection in the lake he thought he resembled the lion! Only the mane was missing! He felt so proud of this resemblance that he actually thought he could do all that the lion did!

As the fox came closer to the golden cave a question arose in his mind, "Why should I eat the animal killed by the lion? I can also kill. I am going to ask him to eat the animal killed by me. I am in no way smaller than him."

The lion was leisurely combing his mane when the fox entered the cave. He cleared his throat and said, "After living with you for so long, I have also become as strong as you. Let us change our roles from tomorrow."

"What do you mean?" asked the lion.

"Well, let me elaborate." The fox proudly swung his bushy tail and continued, "Tomorrow you will go on the mountain top and spot the animal you would like to eat. I will wait for you in the cave. You will come to me and say 'I want to eat such and such animal. Please show your greatness.' Then I shall go and kill that animal. I shall eat the meat first and you will eat whatever would be left behind by me."

The lion got worried about the arrogance and stupidity of the fox. He spoke with a lot of concern, "Have you forgotten that you are a fox and I am a lion? You can be easily killed by others."

"But now I am as strong as you. I saw my reflection

in the lake. I look so much like you!" said the foolish fox.

The lion once again tried to dissuade him, "You may resemble me in outward appearance, but you should know that you are basically a fox. You are not as strong as me!"

"How dare you call me weak!" the fox retorted. "I can do all that you can do. Why should I depend on you for my food?"

The lion pitied the arrogant fox. He tried his best to make him realise the risk involved in exchanging the roles but the fox failed to understand that. The lion finally agreed to the new arrangement.

Next morning the fox woke up early. The lion was still sleeping. The fox was so excited about his new role that he pulled the lion's tail and woke him up. He asked the lion to go to the mountain top and spot the animal he would like to eat. He even suggested that he could kill an elephant to begin with!! The lion, for the last time tried to dissuade him, "A fox has never ever killed an elephant. Why don't you understand this?"

"You have been killing elephants. Why can't I? What makes you think that you are better than me?" said the foolish fox. He nearly pushed the lion out of the cave to spot an elephant!

The lion went to the top of the mountain. He spotted an elephant and returned to the cave. The fox was lying in bed. His posture was similar to that of the lion! The lion finally said what the fox was yearning to hear, "I want to eat that elephant. Please show your greatness."

The fox sprang from the lion's bed. He came out of

the golden cave. He yawned and stretched his legs and body, exactly as the lion did. Then he walked towards the elephant. He gook two steps forward, one step backward and leapt on the elephant's head to kill him. The elephant shook his head in fury. The fox fell near his feet. The elephant looked at the animal lying at his feet, lifted one leg and crushed his head as if it was a lump of clay!

The elephant made a loud joyous sound and walked away. The lion saw the fox's 'greatness' squashed. He thought – Arrogance made him blind. He invited death on himself. I wish he had listened to me! And two tears rolled out of his eyes.

The Real Saviour

The Bodhisattva was once born as a golden deer. His eyes shone like precious gems. He was big and handsome. Surprisingly, no one else in his clan was golden like him. He lived in a forest along with the 500 deer of his clan. He was known as King Deer.

In the same forest lived another golden deer of a different clan. He, too, had 500 deer with him. They used to call him Head Deer.

Both the clans lived happily. Brahmadatta, the king of Varanasi was very fond of eating deer meat. Since he needed a deer for every meal, he hunted for one everyday. He would take his friends along. His friends did not like killing animals. They were not fond of hunting as a sport either, but they could not tell the king that they did not want to go with him. They all had their own jobs and businesses. Their work suffered, thanks to the long hunts!

One day the king's friends got together to find a solution to this problem. They wanted to keep the king happy but also did not want their work to suffer any longer. One of them had a bright idea. He said, "Let us first make a large circular fence with a big door near the palace garden. After that we shall go to the forest with all kinds of weapons and equipments. We will not kill a single deer, but will cordon the area in such a way that they will move with us towards the

enclosure. We shall bring all of them in the garden and close the doors. The king will not go hunting if he gets a deer everyday in his garden. What do you think of this plan?"

"Oh, that's great," said the other. "What a relief ! I hope this works. Only after we succeed, shall we tell the king about the garden. I am sure he will be happy because he will not have to hunt for a deer everyday."

All the others liked the idea. They started working on it immediately. When they chased the deer to the garden they noticed two exceptionally beautiful golden deer in the herd. They were quite sure that the king would be overjoyed to see so many deer living next door, particularly the golden ones!

The king's friends went to the palace and met the king. When he heard about the garden full of deer he rushed to see it. He was obviously very happy. He called his head cook and instructed him to pick up one deer each day for his meal and that he would no longer go hunting.

Just then the king noticed two golden deer in the midst of so many ordinary ones. He called them closer and said affectionately, "Both of you look very special. I promise, you will never be killed in my kingdom."

King Deer and Head Deer heard the king and went away without responding. Perhaps they were more worried about the deer of their clans.

Next morning the cook arrived in the garden. He tried to catch a deer but all of them ran faster than him. Each one tried to save the other. Some of them climbed on the cook's back and even kicked him. The cook failed to catch a single deer. He went back and returned

with his kitchen staff. They all kept running all over the place. Finally, they could catch hold of one deer. They left with their catch. In this wild chase a few deer got bruised and wounded as they tried to dodge the cook and his staff.

The same chase was repeated the next morning and the next and so on. King Deer was very unhappy about this situation. He told the Head Deer, "Let us offer one deer to the cook everyday. We can send one from our clan on alternate days. We shall give them serial numbers, so that they would go on their own. We will not have to remind them. This arrangement will save other deer from being hurt and wounded."

This proposal made a lot of sense. All the deer, of both the clans were numbered. Every morning, one deer as per his turn, would quietly go near a stone slab and wait for the cook. All were comfortable with this arrangement. The days thereafter passed smoothly.

One day a beautiful female deer went to the Head Deer and said, "It's my turn today but I am going to have a baby. Once my baby is born you will have two deer for the king. Why don't you send somebody else in my place today?"

The Head Deer was furious. He yelled, "How can I send someone else whose turn is yet to come. It's your turn today, you will have to go. I don't care about you or your baby."

The female deer wept quietly. She went to King Deer and made the same request. King Deer was kind and considerate. He sympathised with the female deer. He was worried about the unborn baby. He thought for a while and told her, "Don't worry, dear. You will

not go today. Please go and take care of yourself. I cannot ask anyone else but I will take your turn."

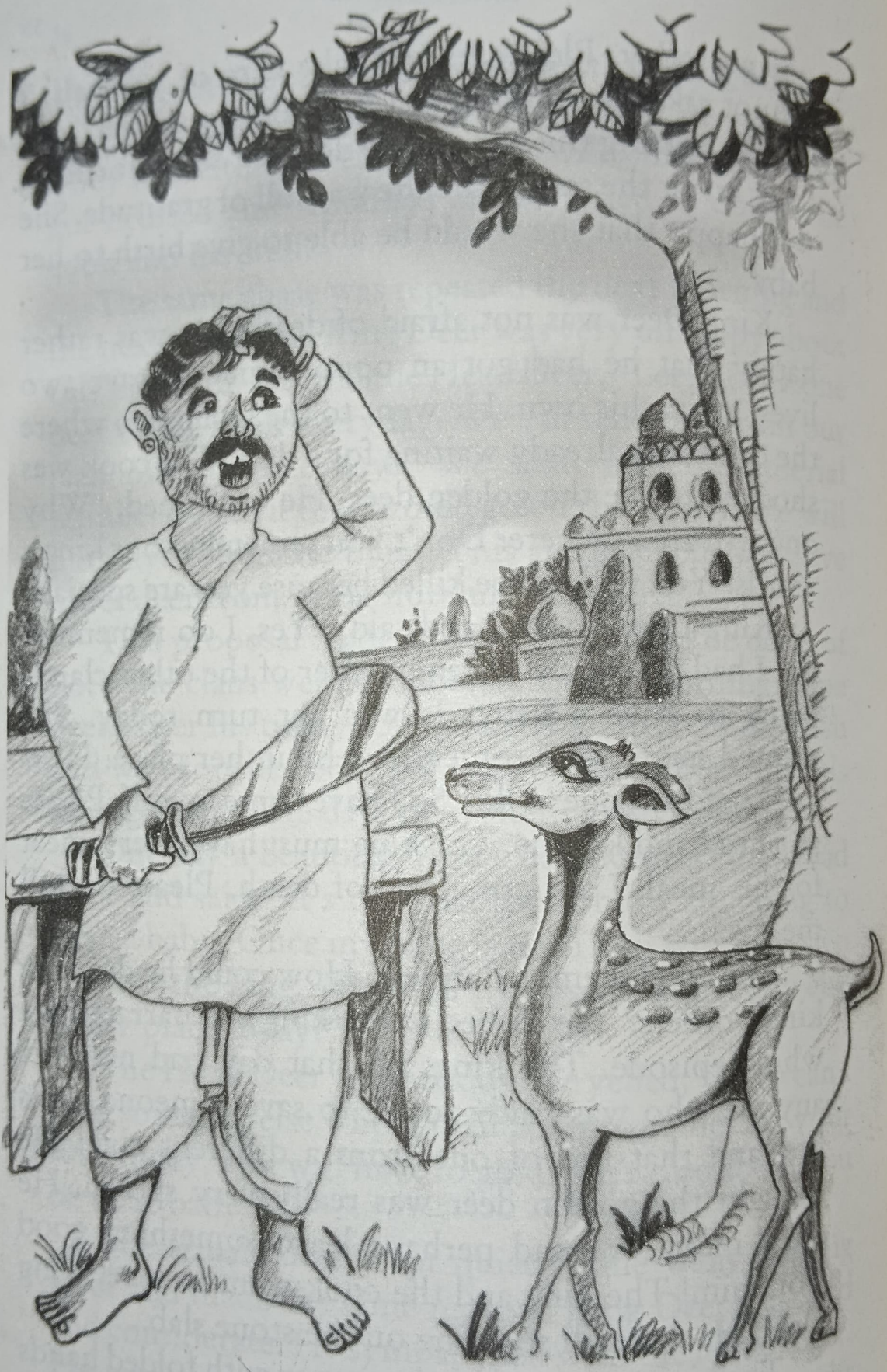
On hearing this the female deer felt sorry for King Deer but at the same time she was full of gratitude. She was happy that she would be able to give birth to her baby.

King Deer was not afraid of death. He was rather happy that he had got an opportunity to save two lives, giving his own. He went to the stone slab where the cook was already waiting for a deer. The cook was shocked to see the golden deer. He exclaimed, "Why on earth are you here? Don't you remember our king's words? You will not be killed because you are special."

King Deer nodded and said, "Yes, I do remember but I had no choice. A female deer of the other clan is going to have a baby. It was her turn today. She wanted me to send somebody else in her place. How can I send anyone to die? So I have come myself. Please go ahead and kill me. The king must have deer's meat for his meal. I am not afraid of death. Please do kill me."

The cook trembled in fear. How could he defy the king's orders? He rushed to the king and narrated the whole episode. The king, till that day had not met anyone who was ready to die to save someone else's life, and that too of one from a different clan! He thought the golden deer was really very special. He must meet him and perhaps learn something good from him! The king and the cook went to meet King Deer. He was still standing on the stone slab.

The king expressed his reverence with folded hands and told King Deer, "You are such a noble soul! I have



not seen anyone with such kindness, forgiveness and humility. I give you and the female deer assurance of safety."

King Deer was pleased to hear this, but he was worried about the safety of all the deer imprisoned in the king's garden. So he said, "Thank you for your kindness. But what about other deer in this garden? They should also live."

The king readily agreed to give assurance of life to all the deer.

"Well, those of us who are here in the king's garden will be protected. But I am worried about all the four-legged animals living in the forest and at far off places. How can you protect us but kill them?" asked King Deer.

"I assure you of their safety too," said the king.

Noticing the king's change of heart King Deer went further and sought assurance of safety for birds and water creatures as well. The king granted assurance of life to all the creatures on the land, the sky and in water. All the deer were jubilant when they heard that the king had promised that he and his people would not kill anyone.

A few days later that female deer gave birth to a beautiful little baby. The very first lesson she taught the baby was – "Always stay in the company of kind and good people."

A Golden Plate

Bodhisattva was once born as a jeweller. He would carry his precious jewellery in a box and sell it like a vendor in the streets.

One day he decided to go to another town known as Andhapur. After crossing the river in a boat he reached the new place. He saw another jeweller alighting from the boat tied next to his. He, too, was selling similar pearls, diamonds and precious gems. Both of them had arrived in Andhapur at the same time for selling jewellery! They realised that it would be difficult to sell the goods if they both went to the same locality at the same time. So they divided the town into two. Bodhisattva was to sell his jewellery in the streets of one part and the other jeweller was to cover the other part. They were free to go to each other's streets only after covering their own territory. This arrangement seemed good to both of them.

An old lady lived with her granddaughter in that town. They had a big house to themselves. The old lady's husband was once a rich merchant but he faced a severe setback in his business and lost all his wealth. The merchant could not bear the shock. He died. Over a short span of time, other family members also died. What was left of a large joint family were this girl and her grandma. They had no money. They worked in the houses of their rich neighbours and earned a little.

At times they would even sell a piece of furniture or a utensil, and somehow carry on with their lives.

This house fell in the territory of the other jeweller. He passed by the house. The girl heard his call. He was selling pearls and diamonds! She was tempted to buy something for herself. She ran up to her grandma and said, "Please, buy me a pearl string. I haven't worn anything beautiful for a long, long time."

"We have no money. How can we buy pearls?" said her grandma feeling utterly helpless.

The girl ran to the kitchen and brought a metal plate. It was tarnished. It looked like a piece of junk. She asked grandma, "Can I sell this? It has been lying on the upper shelf for ages! It is of no use to us."

Grandma looked at it and agreed.

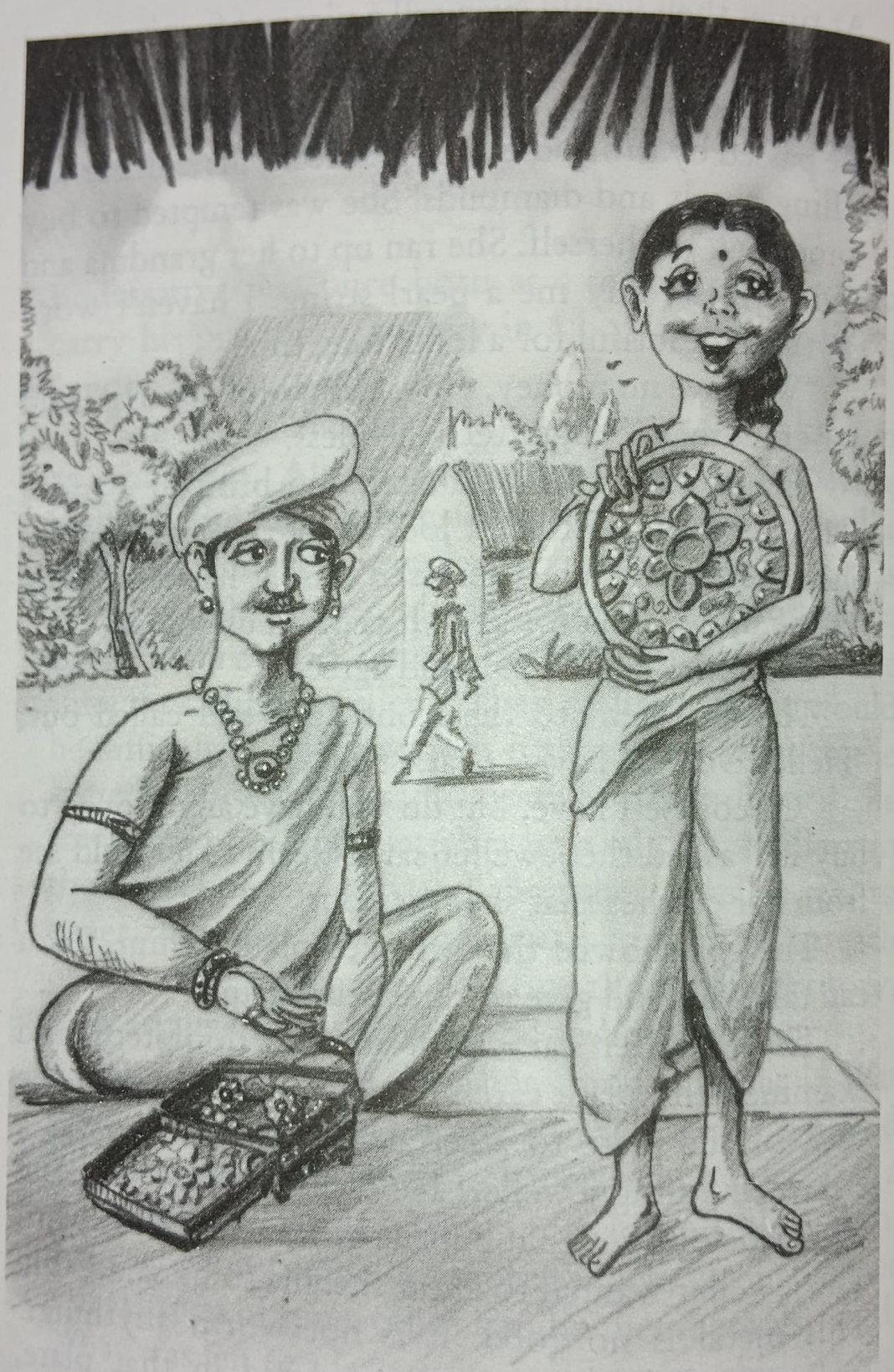
The girl went to the front door and called out, "Hello! Do you have a pearl string?"

"Of course I have, but do you have any money to buy it?" asked the jeweller sarcastically. He could see from her clothes that she was poor.

The girl showed the tarnished plate to him, "You can take this and give me one pearl string."

The jeweller sat down on the doorsteps and examined the plate carefully. He even scratched the back of the plate to ascertain the metal. He was a greedy, cunning jeweller. He could see that the plate was made of pure gold but the girl did not know this. The jeweller wanted to cheat the girl so he said, "Oh! This metal is no good. It is not worth anything." He pretended he was not interested in that plate, and left.

After a while the good jeweller arrived in the same



lane. He too called out, "Pearls and diamonds! Rubies and emeralds! Any takers?"

The girl again ran up to her grandma and coaxed her to buy her a pearl string. Grandma was sad. She had no money. How could she make the child happy? She hugged the girl and said, "How can we buy it? We don't have money!"

"We have that plate. Shall I call him?" said the girl with the hope that her grandma would agree.

Grandma said, "Didn't you see how the previous jeweller discarded the plate as if it was a rusted piece of iron? I think, you better forget about the pearl string."

But the girl was very much impressed by the voice and face of the second jeweller. She told her grandma, "The first one was harsh and ill mannered. This one looks so kind and gentle! At least allow me to show the plate to him."

Seeing her granddaughter's strong desire for pearls the grandma gave in.

The girl rushed to the front door and showed the plate to the second jeweller. He immediately recognized the metal. It was pure gold! He told her, "This is an extremely precious plate. I don't have sufficient jewellery to give you in exchange. You can take all my jewellery and also the 500 coins that I have. Even then, I don't think it would match the price of this plate."

The girl and her grandma were stunned! They could not believe their luck! But it was true. Bodhisattva jeweller gave everything he had against that golden plate. He picked up his scales, the empty box and asked them to lend him 8 coins so that he could take the boat home.

He took the golden plate, kept it carefully in the box and immediately left for home. He gave 8 coins to the boatman to take him to the other bank.

In the meantime, the cunning jeweller came back to his own area after completing the round of the other part. He thought of taking the plate against some ordinary cheap bangles! He asked the girl to show him the plate once again.

The girl said with contempt, "You cheat! You said it was a piece of junk. But the other good jeweller took it and gave us all the jewellery and money he had with him."

The jeweller kept hitting his forehead with his palm and cried out loudly, "Oh! I have lost the deal. Oh, I've lost a golden chance! Oh, I am ruined! I am finished!" He went mad with frustration, jealousy and anger. In a frenzy, he threw his bag full of precious ornaments at the girl's door and ran towards the river to grab the golden plate from the good jeweller.

As he reached the river he saw the boat sailing towards the other bank. He yelled and screamed, "Hey boatman, stop, stop. Come back."

But the good jeweller asked the boatman to keep moving, "Don't stop. We shall not return." They kept moving ahead.

When the greedy jeweller saw the other one going, he could not contain his frustration and suffering. He kept screaming like mad. His body trembled with rage. His eyes turned red. He vomitted blood and collapsed. He died, carrying within him enmity against the good jeweller.

An Angry Prince

Bodhisattva was once born in a very learned family. His parents sent him to the University of Takshashila to study the Vedas and various arts. On his return he helped his parents in their household duties. He also shared his knowledge with others.

The learned young man decided to go to the Himalayas after his parents passed away. He meditated for years till he felt that he had grown in wisdom and compassion. At that point in his life he decided to go back amongst the people and work for their happiness.

After coming down from the Himalayas, he bathed in a river and dressed like an ascetic. He decided to lead a simple and austere life. He took a begging bowl in his hand and entered the city. His serene face and compassionate eyes impressed whoever saw him. He smiled at all – big and small, rich and poor.

The ascetic entered a beautiful garden. He took slow and steady steps. His gait was dignified like a king. Little did he realise that he was in the king's garden and was spotted by the king from the palace balcony. The ascetic's personality attracted the king. The king asked his minister, "Do you see that great man in the garden?"

The minister had dozed off when the king was watching and admiring the ascetic. He woke up with a start, shook his head several times and hastened to say,

"Yes, yes, oh yes, my lord!"

"I would like you to go to him and tell him that I desire to talk to him. Please go and bring him here," ordered the king.

"Yes, of course. I'll bring him right away," said the minister and hurried to the garden. The ascetic was about to leave. The minister ran after him and shouted as loudly as he could, "Please, please wait." The ascetic heard him and stopped. The minister ran up to him. He took the begging bowl from his hand but was unable to speak because he was breathless.

The ascetic could not understand what this man wanted from him. He asked, "What is the matter, my dear man? Are you all right? Why are you so breathless?"

The minister folded his hands and begged, "I humbly request you to please come to the palace. Our king desires to see you."

"I am sorry, sir," replied the ascetic in a gentle and humble voice. "I have been living in the Himalayas. I do not go to the palaces of kings. Please forgive me." Having said this the ascetic took his bowl from the minister's hand and started walking.

The minister ran back to the king and narrated all that had happened. The king asked him to again go to the ascetic, show utmost respect since he was not an ordinary person, and bring him to the palace.

The minister rushed to the ascetic who had already gone out of the palace garden. Once again he folded his hands and pleaded, "Please come with me. Our king is very eager to meet you. He needs your advice on certain matters. Please come."

The ascetic somehow felt that the minister would be in trouble if he did not go with him, so he agreed to meet the king.

As soon as they reached the palace gates the king greeted the ascetic. He gave him a seat on the golden throne. The king sat on a lower seat. He fed the ascetic with the best of cuisine specially made for the occasion. The ascetic thanked the king for his excellent hospitality and got up to leave.

The king asked, "Where do you live, O' learned man?"

"I live in the Himalayas," replied the ascetic.

"Where will you go now?" asked the king.

"I am looking for a suitable place to spend the monsoon," replied the ascetic.

"I would feel highly obliged if you agree to stay in my guest house situated in the garden." The king requested with the humility of a disciple.

The ascetic was touched by the genuine feelings of the king and agreed.

The king began to visit the ascetic frequently. The closer the king came to the ascetic, the more he was impressed by his noble qualities and wisdom.

The king had an 18-year-old son. Despite being well-educated, he was an angry and arrogant young man. He humiliated people. The king was very unhappy with his son's behaviour. This unworthy son would be the heir to the throne. The king is supposed to treat his people with love and care, like his own children but his son had opposite traits! The king was much worried about him.

During one of his visits to the ascetic, the king

spoke to him about his son, "I am extremely worried about my son's temperament. He is at times so rude to others, and is so short-tempered that we all suffer because of him. I would remain indebted to you for ever if you please help us improve him."

The ascetic had great confidence in the positive aspect of human nature. He told the king that he would try his best to help the prince.

Well, the prince was immediately sent to the ascetic. The king had ordered him to stay there as long as the ascetic desired. The prince was reluctant to leave royal luxuries behind and live in austerity with the ascetic, but he had no choice!

The ascetic welcomed the prince with a smile and affectionately patted him on the head. He held his hand and took him for a stroll in the garden. They saw beautiful butterflies and birds, lotuses and roses. The prince seemed to enjoy the beauty. They came across a small plant near a neem tree. It had only two twigs and a few tender leaves on them. The ascetic plucked one leaf and asked the prince to chew it. As soon as he crushed the leaf between his teeth he spat it out. He felt like vomiting!

"Why? What happened?" asked the ascetic calmly.

"Do you want to kill me?" asked the prince angrily.

"Of course not! What makes you think so?" The ascetic's voice remained calm.

"That leaf of the tiny plant was bitter like poison." The prince continued, "How dangerous will it be when it grows! It will take many precious lives. I will uproot it right away, so that no one eats its leaves even by mistake." The prince uprooted the plant and threw

it away. He wiped his hands with his silk scarf. He was still angry with the ascetic. The frown on his face showed that he was fuming inside!

The ascetic was smiling. He led the prince away from that site. They sat near the pond of lilies. Cool breeze and the ascetic's serene face helped the prince to cool down. The ascetic started the conversation. His voice was gentle, "You were absolutely right, my dear. Any dangerous thing should be nipped in the bud. I do appreciate your concern for others. Here, I would like to draw your attention to your own nature. The people of your kingdom are seeing you as an angry and arrogant heir to the throne. They will also uproot you and throw you away just as you did to that plant!"

"Oh no!" exclaimed the prince. "I am the prince of this kingdom. How can anyone dare to do that to me?"

"If your presence is unhealthy for the people, if it is going to harm them, and make them suffer, then someone from among them will definitely uproot you!"

"Oh!" the prince wondered.

"Yes, my child. You should be aware of this possibility. I would like to advise you to uproot bitterness, anger and arrogance from your mind. Please be good and gentle to others. Make friends with the people around. This change will bring a lot of happiness in your own life and others will also feel secure and happy." The ascetic did not mince his words.

The prince closed his eyes. The ascetic's words had penetrated his mind. Each word contained precious wisdom to lead a happy and meaningful life. The prince realised that the real poison was in his own

mind which only he could uproot!

The prince promised the ascetic that he would be a changed person now.

"You have achieved something that is so difficult to understand, accept and implement. You are now free to go back to the palace. Please take good care of your parents and the people of your kingdom."

The prince bowed with reverence and left for the palace.

Small Is Big

King Brahmadatta of Varanasi lived in a big palace. His garden was very beautiful. There was a huge tree in the middle of the garden. It was so tall, that it seemed to touch the sky. Its branches spread in all directions and its leaves were dark green. They shimmered like silver in the sun. The king was very fond of this tree. He would go to the garden only to sit under it. It gave him a great sense of peace and joy.

Hiding in the foliage of this tree was the Tree God. He lived there with his two little children. Near the tree was a patch of thick green grass. Bodhisattva, in that life was born as the Grass God. He was obviously much smaller than the Tree God. His home was also smaller because he lived in the midst of thin tiny grass blades. One day the small Grass God went to make friends with the big Tree God. They soon grew fond of each other.

One day, the king noticed that one of the main wooden pillars of the palace had turned hollow! Hundreds of white ants had made the pillar their home! The king summoned 6 carpenters and showing the pillar to them said, "Look, this pillar will crack in no time. It supports the palace. I would like you to find the best and the strongest tree trunk to replace the hollow pillar at the earliest."

All the 6 carpenters set out to look for a strong, tall

tree. They went in different directions and examined each and every big tree they came across. Unfortunately, not a single tree was found suitable. After having explored the whole kingdom the carpenters returned to the palace. They were scared of reporting their failure to the king, but there was no choice. The king wanted the best wood and there was none suitable!

The king's men asked the carpenters to wait in the garden because the king was taking a nap. They were told that they would be called in as soon as the king was ready for his evening meetings.

The carpenters went to the garden. They were tired and disheartened. They stretched themselves on the grass and looked around. The garden was full of magnificent trees. This was the only place not yet explored by them. They stood up and started examining the tree trunks. Alas! No tree was suitable to become the pillar of the palace. Some were tall but their trunk was not broad enough. Some were broad but not tall enough for a pillar. And some others did not have a solid strong trunk. Even the king's garden could not provide a suitable tree!

One depressed carpenter sat under a tree resting his back against the tree trunk. Immediately he realised that the trunk was quite broad and strong. He got up and noticed that the tree was very tall. "Oh, this is the one," he exclaimed and jumped with joy. He called his friends and showed them the majestic tree standing in the middle of the palace garden in all its grandeur!

All the carpenters examined the tree carefully and thought they had finally found the tree suitable for the pillar of the palace. Since it belonged to the palace

garden they required the King's permission to cut it. They met the caretaker of the garden. The senior most carpenter of the group spoke to him in a somewhat apologetic voice, "The king has asked us to replace one vital pillar of the palace. He wants us to use the best tree trunk. We have explored the whole kingdom but we could not find any tree that could match his need."

The caretaker looked at the other 5 carpenters. They looked sad and worried. The caretaker, feeling sorry for them asked, "How will you face the king? Are you going to report your failure? He will be very unhappy."

"Yes, we know that. Precisely for that reason we have come to you," said another carpenter.

"Do you see that majestic tree in the middle of the garden? That is the only tree suitable for the pillar," said the third one.

The caretaker was shocked to hear that. "Oh no. That's impossible. It is our king's favourite tree. How dare you talk about that tree!"

The carpenters had no other option but to have a direct talk with the king. The king was up. He was sitting in the balcony enjoying the beautiful view of the garden. He saw a group of carpenters approaching the palace gate. He called them in and asked, "So, what news do you have for me?"

The senior carpenter mustered courage and said, "We have examined each and every tree of the kingdom. There is only one tree which is strong and suitable for the pillar, but it cannot be cut."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because that is the favourite tree of His Majesty."

"Oh no! You can't cut that tree. That is my tree. It gives me joy and comfort. No, not that tree." The king expressed his denial in so many words.

The carpenter folded his hands and told the king, "In that case the pillar cannot be replaced."

The king was silent for a while. Then he took a deep breath and said, "Well, if that is the case, I guess, I will have to give you the permission to cut it. The whole palace will collapse if that pillar gives way."

The king, most unwillingly, gave permission to cut the tree, and asked his men to plant two more of the same kind, at the same place.

The carpenters left happily. They went back to the garden to examine the tree once again. They also discussed their plans for the next day. Each one was asked to reach the garden with his tools soon after sunrise.

The Tree God heard their conversation in alarm. He cried on the shoulder of his friend, the Grass God, "Today I heard that my tree will be cut tomorrow morning.Where will I go with my children? This tree is my life. I will die if the tree dies. Please help me. My friend, please help me."

"But why?" asked the Grass God. He too was shocked.

"I have no idea." The Tree God began to shed tears.

"Please don't cry. Let me think of something to save you." The Grass God comforted his friend. Then he closed his eyes, as if in prayer. And like a bolt of lightning, an idea came to his mind.

"I think, I will be able to help you. I will not say anything right now, but you will see my trick

tomorrow," assured the Grass God.

The Tree God went back to his children. He could hardly sleep at night.

Next morning, the Grass God transformed himself into a chameleon. He saw the carpenters going towards the tree. They kept their tools on the ground and worshipped the tree. They even made some offerings. While they were busy with their rituals the chameleon, using his divine powers entered the tree trunk from the roots and went up, as if the tree trunk was hollow like a tunnel! Then he peeped out of the trunk right in front of the senior most carpenter.

"How can this chameleon come out of the solid trunk?" he wondered. He asked others to see this unusual sight. They all agreed that the trunk was hollow, and therefore not suitable for the pillar. Feeling extremely sad they left the garden with their tools. The tree was not cut. They had to look for some other tree for the royal palace.

The Tree God expressed his deep gratitude to the Grass God. He said with all humility, "Although I am bigger and stronger than grass, I guess, I lack wisdom to protect myself. One must make friends with others; no matter how big or small they may seem. A 'big' can be small and a 'small' can be big. Each one is capable of helping others in one's own way!"

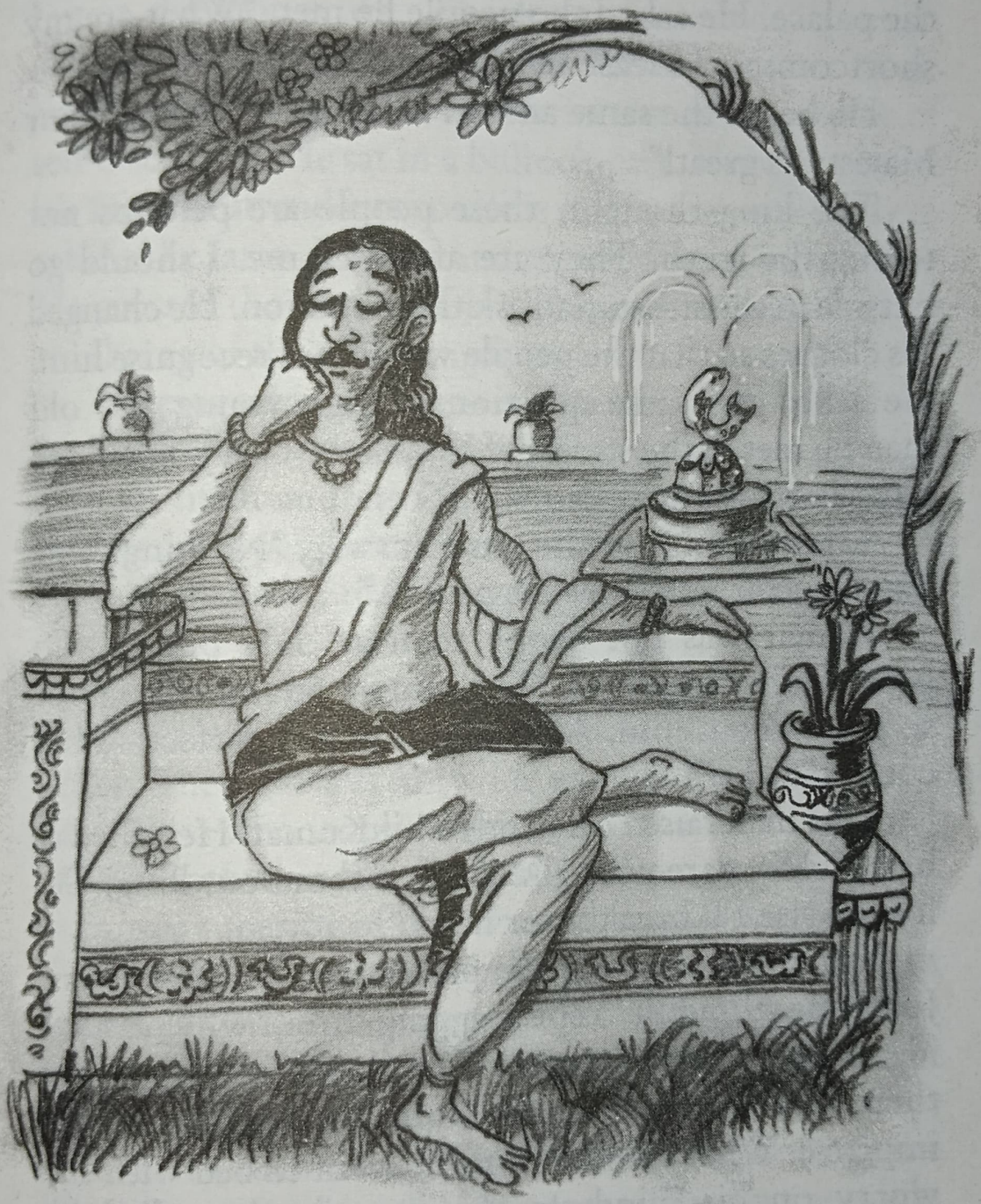
Who Is Greater?

Bodhisattva was once born as a prince. His name was Brahmadattakumar. Since the name was such a mouthful he was fondly called Kumar. He was brought up with great care and love. The scholars of different disciplines would go to the palace to teach him various subjects. The king even sent him to the University of Takshashila for further studies. There, too, he excelled over others.

Kumar returned to Varanasi after completing his studies. His father had grown old and weak. He gave the reins of his kingdom to Kumar and lived a more relaxed, retired life.

Kumar was a man of truth and justice. The people in his kingdom were happy. He sat on the seat of justice and dealt with each case impartially and with compassion. He never allowed his emotions to interfere with his duties. Gradually, the people of his kingdom stopped quarrelling. The courts closed down. Lawyers and judges had to change their profession because they were no longer needed. Kumar was happy to see the change in the people's hearts. They were living in peace and harmony.

One day, Kumar was sitting all alone in the garden. He was engrossed in deep thoughts. He was trying to figure out what were his weak tendencies, wrong and negative attitudes that he must change to become a



more capable king. He thought for a long time but could not identify any. So he got up and went inside the palace. He asked the people he met, "What are my shortcomings? Please tell me."

He heard the same answer from all of them, "Your Majesty is great!"

The king thought, these people are perhaps not telling the truth. They are afraid of me. I should go outside in the streets and ask their opinion. He changed his clothes so that the people would not recognise him. He asked the same question to each young and old man he met in the streets of Varanasi, "Can you tell me what is wrong with our king?"

All of them gave the same answer, "Nothing. Our king is great. He loves his people."

Kumar was not happy to hear only praises. To prod further he asked, "There must be something not so good about him. After all no one is perfect. What could that be?"

One man raised his hand to hit Kumar. He yelled at him, "How dare you talk like this about our king! Get lost or else I'll break your head."

Kumar returned to the palace with a heavy heart. Just one thought kept nagging him, why can't I identify my shortcomings? Why doesn't anyone point them out to me? I know I am not perfect. I must improve. What should I do? He went to bed with this worry on his mind. In the morning he called his ministers and announced, "I will not be able to perform my duties as the king of Varanasi unless and until I find out what my shortcomings are. I shall stay away for sometime. I leave the kingdom in your hands.

Please take good care of the people till I return."

The ministers tried their best to dissuade the king but it did not work. The king discarded his royal clothes and ornaments and put on the clothes of an ordinary man of the street. He set out on a journey of self-discovery. He sat in a bullock-cart. He took one of his faithful attendants to drive it. On the way he kept asking the same question and received the same answer. He crossed the border of his kingdom and entered the rural area of the next kingdom.

A strange thing happened. The ruler of the kingdom of Kosala was also like King Kumar. He, too, was a man of truth and justice. One day, he decided to go amongst his people to find out what they thought of him. Since he heard only praises he, too, went to the rural area.

Both the kings travelling in their bullock-carts reached the same road. At one point they faced each other. The road was not wide enough for two carts to pass. Now who would move back to make way for the other? Both the cart drivers got down to figure out who was superior of the two and should pass first.

The drivers started checking various details. Both the kings were of the same age. When they checked the expanse of the kingdom it turned out to be the same! Then they checked about their army, the treasury, their fame, their charitable work and so on. Both the kings were equal in all those areas. They were stuck. How to decide superiority of one over the other?

The cart driver of the king of Kosala said after some thought, "Let us see who is greater. I will tell you about my king. He is hard with the hard person and

soft with the soft. He wins over a good man with goodness and a bad man with equally bad behaviour. I think my king is greater than yours, so I think you should let us pass first."

Kumar's cart driver said, "I will now tell you about my king. He wins over an angry man with calmness and a bad man with kindness. He wins a miser with generosity and a liar with truthfulness. I think my king is greater. Please make way for us."

When the king of Kosala heard this he immediately alighted from the cart. He went up to King Kumar and bowed with reverence. Obviously, the one who can win over evil by goodness is greater. The other cart made way for the one carrying King Kumar.

Sage Dog and the King

In the city of Varanasi the Bodhisattva was born as a dog. Being a Bodhisattva he was naturally the wisest and the most courageous.

There were many dogs in Varanasi. The most pampered and arrogant lot was in the king's palace. These special dogs got the best food in taste and variety, whereas street dogs had to eat whatever they could find. That was why the palace dogs were healthy and robust while the street dogs were weak and thin.

One day the royal dogs entered the stable from behind the palace. This was a special stable for the king's horses and chariots. They saw beautiful leather reins and straps lying loose on one of the chariots. For a long time these dogs had not come across any leather. Their food in the palace was too fancy even for a common man. Obviously their mouths began to water. Their true nature had surfaced. They wanted to eat up the reins and the straps, but they also knew that if the king got to know about it they would lose their lives!

The temptation proved stronger than their wisdom. They quietly ate up the leather and went back into the palace. Nobody had seen them.

Next morning, when the chariot driver and groom went inside the stable they were shocked to see bits and pieces of the reins and straps scattered on the ground. The leather was of a fine quality and quite

expensive. They immediately reported the matter to the minister. He called the stable guards. They knew nothing about the incident and vouched that not a single dog, not even a sparrow had entered the front gate.

The matter was reported to the king. He was furious. He called a meeting of his ministers and advisors. They all kept thinking as to who would dare to enter the king's stable? Who could eat up well-tendered leather? This cannot have been done by a man, mouse or a cat.

"I know," said the senior minister. "The dogs of Varanasi do like leather. I am sure, this is their doing."

"Dogs...?" roared the king. "I want all the dogs of this city put in prison instantly. How dare they enter my stable! How dare they eat up the leather straps of my chariot!"

"Yes, I agree," said each one present in the meeting.

"The culprits should be severely punished so that no one dares commit such a crime in future," said another minister.

"Yes, you have given good advice," said the king and paused for a moment. Perhaps he was trying to think what could be the most severe punishment. And the next moment his lips quivered. He roared, "Death...Death is the only answer. Kill all the dogs in my kingdom."

All were stunned. Some of them did not approve of killing but no one had the courage to speak out.

Varanasi looked very different from the next day onwards. Dogs and the king's men were chasing each other. Some men were bitten by dogs and some dogs

were badly wounded by the royal staff. Shops were closed because the owners were afraid of dogs breaking and destroying their goods. Parents did not send children to play in the streets. They did not want them to get caught in the chase and break their bones. The city of Varanasi was in total chaos!

Some dogs got together behind the bushes of a garden to discuss the situation. They wanted to save the lives of their comrades. One black dog looked wiser than the others. He said. "Let us go to Sage Dog. He lives in the cremation ground. He will surely find a solution to this problem."

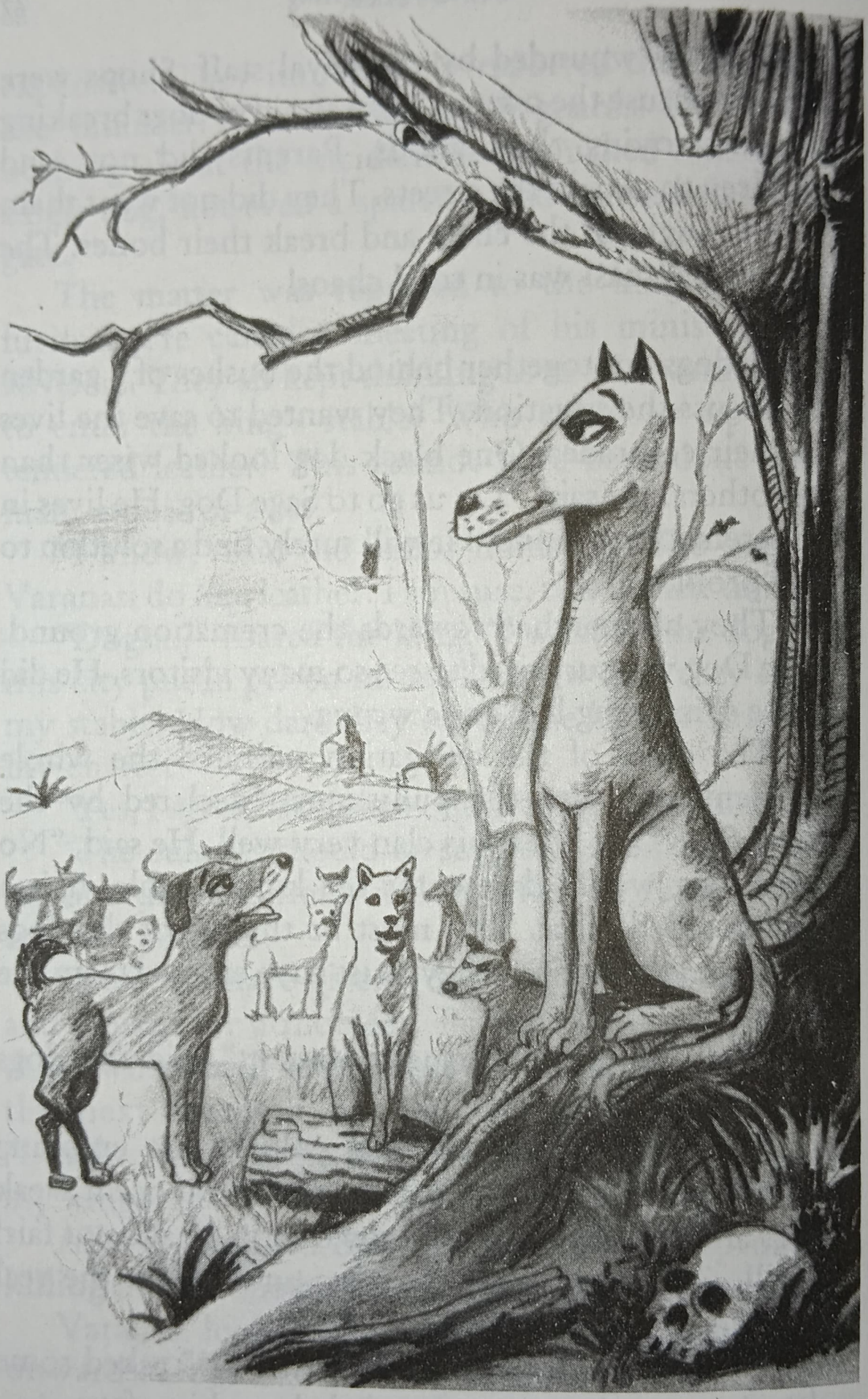
They all marched towards the cremation ground. Sage Dog was surprised to see so many visitors. He did sense something had gone wrong.

The chief of the delegation narrated the whole incident, and also the punishment declared by the king. Sage Dog knew his clan very well. He said, "No street dog would dare enter the king's stable. It is a well-guarded place. This must be the job of the dogs staying in the palace. They must have entered from the back."

"Yes, we are quite sure about it," said the dogs almost in chorus.

"This means that the real culprits are enjoying themselves in the king's palace and the innocent weak dogs are being killed by the royal staff. That's not fair! I will right away meet the king and expose the real offenders," said Sage Dog.

"Would you like us to go with you?" asked some dogs because they were worried about his safety.



Sage Dog assured them that he would be safe. No one need worry about him.

Then he shut his eyes in prayer and summoned his inner powers to help him in this courageous mission. He was determined to stop the killings, disclosing the truth. He asked all the dogs to hide somewhere to save themselves. And he immediately left for the palace.

Sage Dog's powers had a tremendous impact on others. Although he was a dog, no one could catch, hit or stop him from entering the palace. He went straight to the king and sat under his throne. Some ministers got up to pull the dog out but the king stopped them.

After catching his breath, Sage Dog came out and stood in front of the king with reverence. Politely but boldly he asked, "Have you ordered your staff to kill all the dogs of Varanasi?"

"Yes, of course," said the king in an authoritative tone.

Sage Dog asked another question, "May I know their offence?"

"Well, the offence is very serious. Some of them have eaten up the reins and straps of my chariot. How dare they do this?" The king's anger was apparent in his voice.

"Do you know who have eaten them?" asked Sage Dog.

The king shook his head in negative. He paused for a moment and hastened to say, "Whoever they may be. One thing is certain. Some dogs have eaten up the leather of my chariot, so they have to die. That's it."

"This means that each and every dog of Varanasi

will be killed. Or are there some dogs that will not be killed?" asked Sage Dog.

"Yes," said the king. "My loyal and handsome palace dogs definitely will not be killed." The king obviously wanted to protect his personal dogs.

Sage Dog reminded the king about his duty, "The king should be impartial. How can you be kind to your dogs and cruel to the weak ones? Your own people all over the kingdom will lose respect for you if you show such partiality. You are going against the king's code of conduct."

The king found Sage Dog's words quite convincing. After a minute's silence he addressed Sage Dog with reverence. "Do you know who could have eaten the reins and straps?"

"Yes, they have been eaten by your dogs," said Sage Dog with confidence.

"You can't have such a charge. You will have to prove it," demanded the king.

"I can definitely prove it," said Sage Dog without any hesitation. "Get your dogs here. And also bring me some churned curd and a bunch of green grass."

Everything was brought and placed in front of Sage Dog. He mixed grass with churned curd and made the king's dogs drink all of it.

The dogs began to lick the stuff from the bowls kept in front of them. All were staring at them without a blink. Their breath seemed to have stopped for a while!

Well, as soon as the dogs emptied the bowls they began to vomit violently and what came out was undigested leather of the reins and straps!

All the onlookers were shocked. The king was extremely pleased with Sage Dog. He had saved him from committing a crime. He had also enlightened him about impartial conduct and his duty towards all in his kingdom.

The king realised that this was no ordinary dog. He made Sage Dog sit on a throne equal to his own and garlanded him with reverence. Sage Dog blessed him and left.

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